SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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UNTOUCHABLE CASTES

Mala
(An untouchable caste)

Madiga
(An untouchable caste)

The above table does not include the Panch Bramha group. In point of religion they are Hindus, but their position in the caste hierarchy is rather uncertain. This group comprises five divisions: The Wadla (carpenter), the Kammari (blacksmith), the Ausula (goldsmith), the Kase (carver of figures in wood and stone) and the Kanchari (worker in bell-metal). Of these only the first three sections are found in Shamirpet. Inter-dining and inter-marrying, these sections constitute a distinct group of their own. In the local caste hierarchy they should be placed below the Kapu-Kummari-Golla group, but it cannot be said that they rank equal to or below the Sale-Gaondla group.

Among Hindus the Brahmin holds the highest place. He officiates at the ceremonies of all castes, except those of the Vaddar, the Erkala, the Pichha-Kuntla, the Mala and the Madiga. However, he is consulted by these castes also regarding the auspicious timing of agricultural operations or to perform marriage ceremonies; and his astrological calculations are eagerly sought by all people. All castes, except the Panch Bramha group, will accept food at his hands, but being 'pure and high-born' he cannot accept food from the hands of any but his caste fellows.

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The Komtis rank next to the Brahmins. They are mostly traders and money-lenders, keeping small shops where they sell grain and general provisions. All castes except the Brahmin and the Panch Bramha group accept food at their hands, but they do not take food from those castes whose social position is lower than their own, and thus can only accept food at the hands of the Brahmins.

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The Reddi sections of the Kapu (agricultural) group, the Kummari and the Golla castes are of equal caste status. Although each is an endogamous caste, they will freely inter-dine with each other, and social contact between them is on a basis of equality. The position of the other Kapu section, viz. Muttarasi, is a little lower. The first Kapu section as well as the Golla will eat at their hands, but the Kummari will refuse food which they have touched.

On the next level are the Sale and the Gaondla, who enjoy a

agricultural season the Vaddars accept other work also for extra wages.

The Erkalas earn their livelihood through a variety of means. The menfolk are hunters. They are also adept in the use of snares and traps. They train hunting dogs and use them effectively for chasing and tracking wounded animals. When they succeed in getting some game, they retain a part of it for their domestic consumption and sell the rest to the villagers. The women beg in the countryside by singing songs and narrating legends. They also do some fortune-telling. Family earnings are supplemented by basket-making, a task at which both men and women work. They also rear pigs.

THE MADIGAS

The Madigas are the lowest caste in Shamirpet. Economically they constitute the poorest section of the community. While the Malas, who are also untouchables but a degree higher than the Madigas, either cultivate their own land or work as farm labourers for daily wages, the Madigas affiliate themselves to the households of the substantial agriculturists in the village. According to the size of the land-holding of the cultivator, one or more Madiga families permanently attach themselves to him. At every stage of agricultural operations during the year the attached Madiga, and his wife and children, work in the fields of their master. They are not paid any daily wages. After the crops are harvested they have to go and 'beg' in the master's fields or threshing grounds. The conventions of the community have prescribed the rates of payment, mostly on the basis of the area of land under cultivation and the yield during the particular harvest. Thus for a certain area a basic minimum must be given; but if on account of good crops the yield has been high it is expected that the affiliated Madiga family would be given a proportionately larger share. In former times there used to be considerable compulsion, and, being in no position to protest, the Madigas had to slave for their masters, who could be quite ruthless. If the master was kind and considerate, they regarded it as their good luck. On the whole it was advisable for them to tolerate even a bad master, for any protests or refusal to do the allotted work on their part would eventually have meant their being forced to leave the village. Now, of course, conditions have changed, and Madigas do not any longer put up with indig-

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

241 can be seen carrying their wooden ploughs and driving their pairs of bullocks to the fields. No time must be lost, for the hardening of land may render ploughing difficult and this may eventually result in late sowing.

241 About this time they go to the Brahmin to fix an auspicious ● 787 day for planting vegetables and creepers in their backyards. The Brahmin consults his almanac to find out a day on which the stars of the person and the constellation in the sky match, for such a day is believed to be most suitable for sowing vegetables. Fortified with these astrological predictions, the Hindu agriculturists make initial preparations for planting these backyard crops. Muslims and poorer Hindus do not avail themselves of the services of the Brahmin priest. Beds and pits are kept ready well in advance, and on the appropriate day suggested by the Brahmin (or fixed by the family if the priest has not been consulted) seeds are sown. In the rainy season almost everyone grows some vegetables and creepers, and these are in most cases the only vegetables regularly eaten in any part of the year. The favourites among these vegetables are: runner beans, snake-gourds and pumpkins. Bottle-gourd and sponge-gourd are planted a few days later. Okra, bringals and some other green vegetables are also grown.

241 Later, when more showers have fallen, the agriculturists hasten to sow maize and millet in the fields. A late variety of rice, locally known as *samber*, is sown in carefully made beds to be transplanted into regular fields later.

In the first two weeks of June operations started in late May are continued. Light showers at this time are further utilized to complete the ploughing. Sowing of maize is also continued. Late varieties of paddy are now directly sown into the fields. Fifteen to twenty days after sowing they visit the fields to remove the weeds.

[132] In the second half of June the rainfall is generally regular and satisfactory. During this time people must complete their sowing of *kharif* crops such as maize and millet. Ground-nut, linseed and other oil seeds are also sown during this period. All these crops are grown on dry land as they do not require any extra irrigation.

241 For a month and a half after this the sowing of paddy is continued. At this time mostly coarse and medium varieties are sown. These include two mixed strains developed by the Department of Agriculture, Hyderabad State, and are locally known as paddy

RITUAL STRUCTURE

The Muslim section of the population belongs to the Sunni sect and follows the religious pattern laid down in the Koran as interpreted by the founders of this sect. A devout Muslim is expected to offer prayers five times a day. In Shamirpet this would be the exception rather than the general rule. Some of the Muslim elders offer prayers twice a day, some only once and the rest are contented with their weekly prayers on Friday. The Mulla, the Muslim priest in the village, is the only person who offers the prescribed prayers every day. Fasting during the month of Ramzan is undertaken by a very large number of Muslims, but those maintaining it without a break until the end of the month would not total even a quarter of that number. The Muslims have a high degree of community-consciousness, but in Shamirpet it does not find expression in the form of intense religious devotion among the adherents of the Islamic faith.

With the exception of the Brahmin and the Komti castes, the Hindus have no fixed time for daily worship. The number of people who visit a temple or shrine every day is negligible. But festivals and ceremonies are observed with unfailing regularity. Otherwise the gods are remembered only at times of disease or difficulty. As a rule, only some of the elderly people devote themselves to 'the daily duty of remembering the creator'; the younger people 'have much else to do'. They participate in ceremonies, partake of the festival feasts, and assemble to listen to the reading of the holy books and to the recitation of mythological legends by professionals when they happen to visit the village. The tasks of remembrance and repentance are postponed for old age. Among both men and women, only the elders seem to talk about 'the change of times' and 'the decline in the religious attitudes and ethical standards of the people'. In the everyday thought and speech of the younger generation there is very little of religion; and little conscious effort at seeking any deep religious experience or thrill is to be found among them. In the life of the community under observation, we noticed only two exceptions to this. One of these is the *Urs*, a semi-religious fair, commemorating Jalal Miyan, a local Muslim divine with some reputation for being a holy man. This fair is sponsored by the Muslims but is largely attended by the Hindus also. The second is the annual worship of a village goddess organized by the village. On both these occasions several people are temporarily possessed by the spirit

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

of Jalal Miyan or by one of the goddesses. Going into a trance these people speak for the spirit which possesses them. The other people who are present there make offerings to them, seek solutions of their pressing problems and difficulties, and request them to remedy their ills and worries. Considerable enthusiasm is in evidence among them at this time. With these exceptions there is very little religious thought, talk or worship in normal life.

However, both Hindus and Muslims have a degree of fatalism and demonstrate a spirit of resignation towards predestined facts ordained for them by the supernatural forces of the world beyond. People can often be heard to remark, 'If it is written in our fate, we must submit to it. Human effort cannot alter the will of God. What is predestined must have its course.' But this fatalism makes its appearance only when the people have tried their best to solve the problem and having spared no effort still find themselves no nearer a solution. Coupled with this concept of fate is the Hindu doctrine of *karma*. According to this concept, which takes for granted the phenomenon of the transmigration of the soul and its re-birth, our actions in the past life determine the character of our present life, and our actions in this life will determine the character of our future life. The village people clearly reconcile and synthesize these two views into a practical precept: the course of our present life is largely predestined on the basis of our acts in the past life, but by acting 'rightly' in this life we can materially influence the course of our life after death.

The rural ethic lays great emphasis on 'acting rightly', that is on the observance of traditional norms; because it is the only way to achieve happiness and prosperity in this life, and more than that to ensure the destiny of the soul after death. The problem of the future plays a very significant part in the ordering of life. Both Hindus and Muslims believe that death is not the end; there is something beyond it. Both attach great importance to the destiny of the soul after death. While the Muslim expects to remain in his grave until the Resurrection, when on the Day of Judgement he will be assigned to heaven (*jannat*) or hell (*jahannum*) according to his deeds, for the Hindu life is practically an unending process. After death one either goes to heaven (*swarga*) or to hell (*narka*), or one takes re-birth. Depending on one's actions in the past life, one may be born into one of the castes higher or lower than one's caste in the previous life, or even into some other lower species

RITUAL STRUCTURE

An earthen lamp is lighted and kept near the pot. Vermilion and turmeric paste are applied to the pots. The assembled members of the household then bow down before the images of the gods and pray to them for the prosperity and well-being of the family. If the family does not possess any images, the ceremony is generally performed in the main room of the house and people bow down in front of the pots 'with the thought of the gods in their minds'. A special kind of bread, with a sweet stuffing inside, is made in all well-to-do homes. Among the poorer occupational castes and the untouchables this is not done. Instead they visit the houses to which they are attached and are given a portion of the sweet bread and the drink. 796

The Brahmin family observes the festival in a more elaborate way. The images are bathed and dressed. Along with these the holy books in the possession of the family are also worshipped. 796 787

In the evening people gather together in front of the Deshmukh's house. All the responsible village elders are expected to be present on the occasion. Also the families of other major agriculturists are represented by one or more persons. The Brahmin consults his almanac and makes predictions for the year. Should they expect bumper crops this year? Or do the stars indicate scarcity and famine? Will the year be good for the health of the residents and their cattle? Or is there any apprehension of epidemics? What will be the general price-level in the market? Is there any fear of accidents—of snake-bite, drowning, lightning, etc? These and allied questions are covered by the priest in his forecast. Other questions of popular interest are referred to the Brahmin who tries to answer them on the basis of his astrological calculations. People soon break up into small groups, talk in a reminiscent mood about the years that have gone by, and comment upon the shape of things to come as indicated in the Brahmin's predictions.

Rama Navami. This festival is celebrated on the ninth day of the Hindu month of Chaitra. It is observed only by the Brahmins and Komtis, and by a few other enthusiasts belonging to some of the upper castes. Adults keep a 'fast' on this day; but this fast does not necessitate total abstention from all food. Fruit, milk-preparations, sago and cooked tubers can be eaten after the midday worship of Rama. In a fast like this it is necessary to abstain from cereals, lentils, everyday vegetables and common salt. In general 796

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17
Hindus
Muslims

ing of these variant customs quite a stimulating, though somewhat tedious, task; but a full ethnographic record of them will be out of place here, and only a broad outline of the essentials will be presented, to illustrate their place in the socio-religious life of the Hindus. As the Muslims differ from the Hindus vitally in respect of their *rites de passage* their observances will be described separately.

Birth. On the birth of a child the mother, as well as other members of the family, is ritually impure. On the third or fifth day after the birth the *purudu* rites are performed which remove the ritual impurity of all members of the family except the mother. The mother continues to be ritually impure for twenty-one to thirty days. On the twenty-first day—in some castes on the thirtieth day—the name-giving ceremony of the child takes place. The mother is bathed. The child's head is shaved, and it is put in a cradle. If it is the first child, or the first son, relations from other villages are also invited to participate in the name-giving ceremony. Friends and neighbours from the village itself are always invited. Women sing songs suitable for the occasion. If an ancestor is believed to have taken re-birth the newborn is named after him; otherwise the elders, after mutual consultation or at the suggestion of an important and influential relation, decide upon a name for the child. The name is announced to the assembly of men and women present. Singing is continued for some time longer. The ceremony ends with a feast for relations and some very special friends.

The Brahmin may be consulted for his astrological predictions regarding the future of the child, and also regarding the implications of the position of the stars at the time of birth for the members of the family. On this occasion the Komtis, the Reddi agriculturists as well as other higher caste Hindus with urban contacts may also invite him. Women from the barber's caste act as midwives among all the clean castes; untouchables manage with experienced women from their respective castes. Services of four other castes are essential: the barber for shaving the child's head, the washerman for washing the linen and clothes before the twenty-first day ceremony, the potter for the supply of new pots for ritual purification, and Madigas for playing musical instruments. Payments for these services are prescribed by tradition; and are both in cash and kind.

1; Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

186 564 also accept it, and using different words would say, 'We mind our work and do not get mixed up in local affairs. What use is it fighting like animals?' Others generally say, 'If you strike a Komti with a stick, he will hit you back with his tongue. He has at least a store of filthy abuse which he uses as a weapon of defence. But the Sale is too timid to do even this. All that he can do is to run into his house and hide himself.'

The Gaondla, 'when he is poor, carries empty pots of palm-juice from every house; but when he amasses wealth, his head turns. Then he learns to speak the language of the urban people.'

The Sakali is 'after all a washerman. One who washes the dirty clothes of the rest of the community cannot himself remain clean.' Women belonging to this caste have a reputation for their great capacity for drinking. 'They do not require much persuasion for granting sexual favours to people outside the caste; and the devils —Sakali women—are such adepts in sexual technique that anyone falling into their clutches once remains their slave for ever.'

There are several witty stories about the status of the Mangali (barber). 'No doubt his general status is low, but he always has the advantage of the company of rich and influential men. Do you not sit with him while he is cutting your hair and giving you a shave? Even rich agriculturists have to allow him to sit near them as if he were their equal in status.' 'It is true that his status is not very high. But who does not bow to him? While cutting a king's hair the barber orders "Bend a little towards me", and the king unquestioningly obeys him. Who else can catch hold of your hair, pull your ears or slap you on the cheek? Ask a barber to cut your hair and shave you, and you will have the answer.' 'The agriculturists always have to worry about their crops—in some years they grow well, in others they do not. But there is no uncertainty about the crops harvested by a barber—the beards of his clients grow with an unfailing regularity.'

• 787 The castes in the Panch Bramha group are not regarded as particularly auspicious. 'While starting on a journey if you happen to see a person belonging to one of these groups, you should take it as a sign of ill-luck. It indicates a possible failure of your mission.'

'The Mala and the Madiga will be rude if you are gentle with them, and will be gentle if you are rude to them.' 'Kick him first

25: Whitehead M-3 (no date) 1921 AW1 India
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and kunkuma, offers incense, breaks a cocoanut, and cooks and presents to the image about a seer of rice, which he afterwards eats himself. The rice is provided daily by the villagers. Occasionally fowls and sheep are offered on the Sunday by villagers who have made vows in time of sickness or other misfortunes. When a sheep is sacrificed, it is first purified by washing. The animal is simply killed in front of the image by a Mādigā, who cuts off its head with a large chopper. The blood is allowed to flow on the ground and nothing special is done with it. The head becomes the perquisite of the pūjārī, and the offerer takes away the carcass for a feast in his house. In many villages, both in the Telugu and Tamil districts, water is poured over the sheep's back to see whether it shivers. If it shivers, it is a sign that the goddess has accepted it.[1] Where the people are economical, they keep on pouring water till it does shiver, to avoid the expense of providing a second victim, but, where they are more scrupulous, if it does not shiver, it is taken as a sign that the goddess will not accept it and it is taken away.

A public festival is held whenever an epidemic breaks out. The headman of the village then gets a new earthenware pot, besmears it with turmeric and kunkuma and puts inside some clay bracelets, some necklaces, and ear-rings, three pieces of charcoal, three pieces of turmeric, three pieces of incense, a piece of dried cocoanut, a woman's cloth, and two annas' worth of coppers—a strange collection of miscellaneous charms and offerings. The pot is then hung up in a tree near the image, as a pledge that, if the epidemic disappears, the people will celebrate a festival.

When it does disappear, a thatched shed of palmyra leaves is built near the image, and a special image of clay, adorned with turmeric and kunkuma, is put inside, and beneath it an earthen pot filled with buttermilk and boiled rice. This pot is also smeared with turmeric and

[1] For this widespread superstition see Sir Alfred Lyall, *Asiatic Studies*, I, 19. Cf. pp. 63, 68, 69, 73, 99, below.

25: Whitehead M-3 (no date) 1921 AW1 India
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order to get the rice and the buffalo's head. The idea of carrying the head and rice round a village, so the people said, is to draw a kind of cordon on every side of it and prevent the entrance of the evil spirits. Should any one in the town refuse to subscribe for the festival, his house is omitted from the procession, and left to the tender mercies of the devils. This procession is called *bali haranam*;[1] and in this district *inams*, rent-free lands, are held from Government by certain families of Mādigās for performing it. Besides the buffalo, large numbers of sheep and goats and fowls are sacrificed, each householder giving at least one animal. The head Mādigā who kills the animals takes the carcass and distributes the flesh among the members of his family. Often cases come into the courts to decide who has the right to kill them. As the sacrifice cannot wait for the tedious processes of the law, the elders of the village settle the question at once, pending an appeal to the courts. But in the town of Masulipatam, a Mādigā is specially licensed by the Municipality for the purpose, and all disputes are avoided.

Cocanada. At Cocanada there is only one Grāma-Devatā, Nukalamma (from Nuku, a Tamil word, meaning "to beat"); but she is very ill-tempered, they told me, and gives much trouble. Curiously enough, the present pūjārī is a woman of the fisherman caste. The office was hereditary in her family and she is the only surviving member of it. A male relative acts as deputy-pūjārī. Offerings are made to Nukalamma every day, doubtless on account of her temper. One custom I found observed here, which is not uncommon in these parts. When a victim's head has been cut off, it is put before the shrine and water poured on it. The offerer then waits to see whether the mouth opens. If it does, it is a sign that the sacrifice is accepted.[2] Another ceremony observed here is significant and, doubtless, a relic of the primitive idea

[1] Sanksrit for "presentation of the offering."
[2] See p. 55 n. 1, above.

25: Whitehead M-3 (no date) 1921 AW1 India
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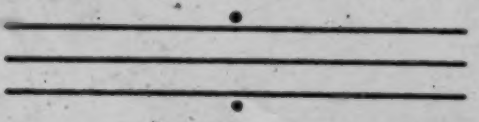
the house outside with cow-dung and make three horizontal lines with kunkuma (a red paste of turmeric and lime), with a dot above and below, and a semi-circle on the right side with a dot in the middle, thus:—



The symbol on the right represents the sun and moon: that on the left is the Śaivite sectarian mark. They sacrifice to these symbols sheep, goats, and fowls. It is curious that, in these private sacrifices at home, they pour water on the sheep and goats to see whether they shiver, as a sign of acceptance,[1] though this is not done in the public sacrifices at Ellore.

Dharmaja-Gudem, near Ellore. At a village called Dharmaja-Gudem, about sixteen miles from Ellore, while the main features of the festivals are the same as those found elsewhere, there are two or three peculiarities, which deserve notice. The ordinary grāma-devatās of the village are Ellaramma, Gaṅgamma, Mutyalamma, and Ravelamma, who are represented by four stone pillars about six feet high, with figures of women carved on them, standing in an open field on the outskirts of the village: but when an epidemic breaks out, Mutyalamma, Gaṅgamma, Aṅkamma and Mahālakshmīamma are the deities propitiated, and special images are made of them. Those of the first three are made of clay, but that of Mahālakshmīamma is made of turmeric kneaded into a paste. Then, again, it is noticeable that a Brāhman acts as pūjārī of Mahālakshmī, a washerman as pūjārī of Gaṅgamma, and a potter as pūjārī of Aṅkamma. The Brāhman pūjārī presides over the worship for the greater part of the festival, which lasts for about three months, and during that time the people come almost every day and offer flowers, fruits, cocoanuts, camphor and incense, but no animal sacrifices. All this time, too, some nautch-

[1] See p. 55 above.

All this time[1] too, some nautch—
girls come and dance in a booth erected in front of the 796
image and work themselves up into a state of frenzy, 776
during which they are supposed to be inspired by the 782
deities, and utter oracles to the worshippers. When 786
the epidemic begins to abate, the Brāhman pūjārī
closes his part of the proceedings and departs.

Then, on that afternoon and evening, animal sacri- [787]
fices are offered under the booth. On the first animal
killed, which is generally a goat, water is poured from
a brass vessel, to see if it shivers.[1] If it does, it is
taken as a good omen that the goddess is propitiated
and the disease will disappear. Then other animals are
brought and, in accordance with a very common division
of functions in the Telugu country, a washerman kills
the sheep, goats, and fowls, and a Mādigā the buffaloes.
The heads of the sheep and goats, as well as of the
buffaloes, have the right forelegs put crosswise in the
mouths, the faces smeared with fat from the entrails,
and a lighted lamp placed above them. The blood is
caught in a basket full of boiled rice, and the rice and
blood are sprinkled round the village, while a Mādigā
carries on his own head the head of a buffalo exactly as
is done elsewhere. Here, too, great care is taken to
prevent any person from another village taking away
any of the rice and blood, lest the other village should
get all the benefit of the sacrifice, and evils of all kinds
descend on the unhappy villagers who have offered it.
The ceremony of impaling live animals on stakes fixed
round a wooden car,[2] and dragging them off to the
boundary of the village is also practised here.

Bhīmadole, near Ellore. At another village, called 241
Bhīmadole, about twenty miles from Ellore, I came 776
across one of the few instances I have met with of any 782
direct connexion between the harvest and the worship 796
of a village goddess. There is an annual festival held
there about harvest time, in November or December,
lasting one day, which is always a Tuesday. About half
a ton of rice is boiled in the middle of the village, taken

[1] See page 55. [2] See p. 58.

1 [see cat 116, p 68 -- ANALYST]